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THE BODY IN REFERENCE TO MORTALITY

REMARKS BY

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INTRODUCTORY TO THE BURIAL OF THE MORTAL PART OF MRS. JULIA
FOOTE TANNER AT WARREN, CONN., APRIL 20, 1902.

2 *Cor.* 5:6, 8.—WE ARE AT HOME IN THE BODY. WE ARE WILLING
TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY, AND TO BE AT HOME
WITH THE LORD.

THE BODY WORTHY.

Philosophy has sometimes depreciated the physical part of a human being. It is a Biblical idea, though not unvarying, that the body is an integral constituent of man's nature. In a metaphorical aspect as representing carnality, so-called, it is dispraised; in its proper nature and functions, its essential character, attributes, and uses, it is treated by the Scriptures as admirable and honorable.

God made the human body, and Beecher declares it to be "by far the most exquisite and wonderful organization which has come to us from the divine hand. It is a study for one's whole life. The stomach that prepares the body's support; the arteries that take up the food and send it round; the lungs that aerate the all-nourishing blood; that muscle-engine, which, without fireman or engineer, stands night and day pumping and driving a wholesome stream with vital irrigation through all the system; the brain, that dwells in the dome high above, like a true royalty,—these with their various and wonderful functions, are not to be lightly spoken of or irreverently held."

Galen, who is called "the father of medicine," was converted from atheism by examining a human skeleton; and he afterwards challenged any one, upon a hundred years' study, to find how any, the least fibre or most minute particle, might be more commodiously placed, either for the advantage of use or comeliness.

"Curiously wrought," was the Psalmist's verdict on contemplating the human body,—*"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."** "I beseech you," said an apostle writing to the Christians at Rome, "to present your bodies a living sacrifice to God."

But these excellent fabrics are perishable; they become disordered and wear out; they deteriorate and decay and fall into ruin. An admirable habitation for the soul twenty years, fifty, perhaps seventy, but at length they are dilapidated to such a degree that they are an unfit dwelling-place for a soul.

WE PRIZE THE BODY AFTER IT IS LIFELESS.

The newspapers have announced, or will soon announce, that Julia Foote Tanner is dead. This announcement will represent a fact; but I think that it will also *mis*represent a fact. Julia Tanner is not dead. Something that belonged to her—this body which she occupied, which she used as an instrument exquisitely adapted to her need—it is disabled and disused, dead. But our venerated friend herself was never so much alive as at this moment. The tabernacle of clay which she inhabited is abandoned, and she is no longer visibly present among us.

The form and features which were her visible personation, we speak of as her "remains," indicating what remains to represent her. And we pay them our respects. We prepare them decently for the funeral solemnity; we provide for them a becoming receptacle; we pass in sad and solemn procession to look upon them once more; we bear them respectfully and tenderly to the burial.

* Ps. 139: 14, 15.

And there is reason in this respect which we pay to a lifeless body. It *belonged* to the departed one. In a drawer or chest, you come across a tiny shoe or a pinafore, and the tears start ; the little relic has a preciousness not accounted for by its intrinsic value. The house in which your sainted mother spent her girlhood,—does it look to you like common wood ? The chair your father sat in—his favorite chair,—can it fail to excite veneration ? The pen with which your sister or your daughter used to write before a Voice called her away into the unseen,—does that represent to you nothing more than the cents or the shillings which it cost ? That is precious which belonged to a departed relative or bosom friend ; and so the body of such an one is rightly held in honor.

We have not said all, have not said enough. Observe that the body *represents* the spirit. It brings to our apprehension the soul, the life, that dwelt therein. One's thoughts and feelings have a fashioning influence on the bodily members, especially the features. The countenance, the eyes, the lips, are an expression of the soul that dwells behind them. We may think of the body not as the real self, but as a photograph of the real self. It pictures to our mind the departed and beloved, the thinking, loving, rejoicing spirit. We value the likeness of an absent friend ; such worth and attraction has the lifeless body.

DESIRABLE THAT THE EXISTING BODY SHOULD BE
SUPERSEDED.

There comes a time, however, when it is desirable that the body be laid aside.

It may have become subject to pain, to unrelenting pain,—is sometimes chiefly an instrument of suffering. When the body means almost nothing except smarting, stinging, gnawing, burning, aching, or oppressive and perpetual weariness, may we not begin to question whether the retention of the body is desirable ? We read of a “body

of death ;” would it be cheerful to think of carrying it always, with its burden of weariness, its load of pain ?

Then, again, the body may become infirm and unserviceable. There may be not only a weakening and disabling of the physical powers, but the faculties of the mind may be clogged and its action impeded,—the understanding may be dulled, the memory decayed, the imagination clouded : may it not seem desirable to be rid of this clog upon the activity of the soul ? Must we not desire and long to be liberated from dominating burdens and disabilities, and recover again the blessings of freedom ?

Consider, again, that man’s body is mortal, subject to death, corruptible, perishable. It seems incongruous that an immortal spirit should dwell perpetually in a mortal body. The mortal answers our need quite well temporarily, but it would be reasonable and correct that there should arise at length a yearning to be clothed with immortality. An immortal spirit should be united with an immortal body.

“ I believe in the resurrection of the body,” is the sublime affirmation of the Apostles’ Creed. On a monument in Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, there is chiselled in large, bold characters the single word, RESURGAM, I shall rise again !—the most inspiring epitaph I have ever seen. How the anticipation of the new, resurrection body, transformed, transfigured, glorified, kindles the enthusiasm of Paul ! He seems a little impatient toward the benighted questioner—stupid, trifling, or sceptical,—With what sort of body will the dead arise ? Thou foolish one, he exclaims : you sow mere grains of wheat ; God supplies each grain with a body that is suitable to it ; in like manner expect his wisdom and goodness to provide the suitable body for an immortal spirit at the Resurrection. It may be as like and unlike the mortal body as plants of wheat growing in summer are like and unlike the bare kernels that were sown in the earth. “ It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption ; it is

sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory." "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly."

IT IS NOT ONE'S SELF, THE I, THE YOU, THE HE, WHICH DIES.

Let me emphasize two or three points.

The revered and beloved relative and friend whom you lament and commemorate to-day is not dead; she has only laid aside or cast off something that she wore as a garment. This truth has been illustrated in the following manner: * James, what is the object I am holding in my hand? A watch, sir. Do you see it? Yes, sir. How do you know it is a watch? Because it ticks, sir. Very well; can any of you hear it tick? All of you listen now. After a pause—Yes, sir, we hear it. The speaker takes off the case and holds it in one hand while he holds the watch in the other. Now, children, which is the watch? you see there are two objects which look like watches. The little one in your right hand, sir. Very well, again. Now I will take the case, and put it away down here in my hat. Now let us see if you can hear the watch ticking? Yes, sir, we hear it. Well, the watch can tick, and run, and keep time, you see, when the case is taken off and buried in my hat. The watch keeps right on running, and marking the time, just as well. And so the body is nothing but a case; it may be taken off and buried in the ground, yet the soul will still live, and think, and love, and enjoy, as well as if it were in its case.

It is pertinent to remark that it is incorrect and misleading to say a person has a soul; a person, every person *is* a soul, and has a body. A person, a man or woman, does not die; it is something which he has, a body, that dies. We may be "at home" in it, as our text says, and we may be "absent" from it. A person departs this life, passes away, ends his earthly career, shuffles off this mor-

* The original is here modified.

tal coil, enters into rest, or, in the beautiful phrase of the early Christians, falls asleep.

Are there not aspirations in each heart
After a better, brighter world than this?
Longings for being nobler in each part—
Things more exalted? * * * *
Death comes to lead me from mortality,
To lands which know not one unhappy hour.

RESURGAM !

Shall I emphasize briefly a second point? The mortal form which like grain we bury in earth to-day will rise again, will come forth as did the body of Jesus from the tomb of the Arimathean,—the same body, yet changed, transformed, glorified, immortal, and re-occupied, re-tenanted by the soul immortal. A “spiritual body,” it is called by a New Testament writer,—purified from animal appetites and propensities,—refined, and endowed with all the noble properties suited to a soul in the celestial state. Death is the gate of life. The body is seed sown by God’s hand to evoke a superior life.

Listen to the poetic utterance of a child of the forest :—Skenandoah, an Oneida chief, was Christianized by the efforts of Rev. Mr. Kirtland, and lived the better life fifty years. Just before he died, in his hundred and twentieth year, he said : “I am an aged hemlock ; the winds of one hundred years have whistled through my branches ; I am dead at the top ;* why I yet live the great Good Spirit only knows. Pray to my Jesus that I may wait with patience my appointed time to die ; and when I die, lay me by the side of my minister and father, that I may go up with him at the great Resurrection.”

A BOOK OF LIFE.

My third point is an incident from the note-book of Nathaniel Hawthorne, that extraordinary genius, so

* He had become blind.

strange and weird : " Monday, April 10th, 1843.—This forenoon, . . . past eleven, I went to the village.* Nothing in our box at the post-office. I read during the customary hour, or more, at the Athenæum, and returned without saying a word to mortal. I gathered, from some conversation that I heard, that a son of Adam is to be buried this afternoon from the meeting-house ; but the name of the deceased escaped me. It is no great matter, so it be but written in the Book of Life."

PERSONAL.

My acquaintance with our deceased friend was very limited, scarcely extending beyond two or three interviews on an occasion when I was a guest in the home of her son. At least two attempts to call upon her while visiting in this town failed. But such interviews as I have had, were interesting to me, furnished me with favorable impressions concerning her, and have ever been recalled with pleasure.

For a great many years she was known to not a few of you, and at such a time, you happily recall her virtues. For more than a generation, I think, she worshipped with you in this sanctuary, and was, I may suppose, a loyal member of the church, and a useful and esteemed member of the community.

Three years ago yesterday we assisted her in the burial of the mortal remains of her husband. And now it is our sombre but hardly mournful privilege to bear her body to God's-acre, and lay it tenderly beside his—to await the Resurrection morn.

* Salem, Mass.



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